

Portable background checks

Frequently asked questions

Why is our state moving to portable background checks on July 1, 2012?

The 2011 Washington State Legislature passed a bill that:

- Required the Department of Early Learning to create a portable background check registry by July 1, 2012. The registry gives those working in licensed child care a individual three-year “portable” clearance card. The card will allow employees to work in more than one facility during those three years without having to reapply for a new background check.
- Requires **everyone** applying for a background check for the first time to undergo a national FBI fingerprint background check. Before, only individuals who had lived in Washington fewer than three years had to undergo a fingerprint check.

For more information about background checks, visit www.del.wa.gov/requirements/new/background.aspx

What does this mean for me?

- All current child care licensees, staff, volunteers and certain individuals who live in a family child care home must undergo a new background check. This will put everyone into the portable background check registry by July 1, 2013.
 - **If you have a current background clearance:** Your new background check must be completed between July 2, 2012 and June 30, 2013.
 - **If your clearance expires before June 30, 2013:** Your new background check must be completed prior to the expiration.
 - **If you are applying for a background check for the first time:** You must be fingerprinted and have a national FBI background check.
- Each child care worker or volunteer must submit and renew his/her own background check applications and pay the fees. Child care licensees may pay the fees on behalf of their employees if they wish to.

Is training available for child care providers on portable background checks?

Yes. A training manual is available online. In addition, DEL is offering training via webinar for child care providers. Find the manual and the training information online at www.del.wa.gov/requirements/new/background.aspx.

Who has to get a background check?

A background check is required for individuals who may have unsupervised access to children in a licensed child care setting. “Unsupervised access” is defined in state rules as:

- An individual will or may have the opportunity to be alone with a child in child care at any time for any length of time; and
- Access that is not within constant visual or auditory range of the licensee, an employee authorized by the Department of Early Learning (DEL), or a relative or guardian of the child in child care.

It is the responsibility of the licensed child care provider to follow the state rules and ensure that anyone



with unsupervised access to children has a cleared background check. If a licensed provider is found by DEL to be out of compliance with this requirement, they are subject to enforcement action.

Why does the state require background checks in child care?

Background checks are important to protect the safety and welfare of children. Ensuring that employees, volunteers and household members do not have a history of criminal activity or child abuse/neglect is a basic but important step DEL takes to promote safe and healthy child care.

Who does the background check and what does it include?

A background check includes two parts, depending on the applicant:

- A **name/date-of-birth background check** is done for all applicants. The application is submitted into an online tool. DEL reviews the application and sends it to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Background Check Central Unit for a criminal history check, inquiries into state court data system, sexual offender registry, and other state agency indices around site and professional licensing histories. DSHS returns the results to DEL, and DEL licensing staff review the applicant's character and suitability by reviewing state child abuse/neglect information. The individual is cleared or disqualified.
- In addition to the name/date-of-birth check, a **fingerprint check** is done for anyone who applies for a background check for the first time in Washington. DEL contracts with a private company that collects electronic fingerprints and sends them to the Washington State Patrol, which works with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to process the fingerprints and send the results to DSHS, which then shares the results with DEL.

How much does a background check cost? Who pays for it?

There are separate fees for background checks and fingerprints:

- A **name/date-of-birth background check** costs \$12 if completed online, and \$24 if completed on paper. This check is required once every three years. The fee is used to maintain the portable background check registry.
- A **fingerprint-based background check** costs \$43.50 for licensees, employees and household members, and \$42.50 for volunteers. This check is only required one time.

Individuals must submit and renew their own background check applications and pay the fee. Licensed providers may cover the cost for employees if they choose to.

Why is the online portable background check registry in MERIT?

Because MERIT is our state's professional development registry. Those who work in licensed child care should be using MERIT to manage their own professional development information. Child care licensees should be using MERIT to track whether their employees are meeting training requirements and background check requirements. Child care licensees should apply for facility registration in MERIT so that they can easily view and track whether their employees are meeting requirements. We are proud to be getting national attention for MERIT.

I don't know how to get registered with MERIT. What do I do?

MERIT, our state's professional development registry, has been online and ready for you to use for more than a year! Get started now:



- Go to <https://apps.del.wa.gov/MERIT/> to get started. **First things first!** Read the FAQ (Professionals) document at the bottom of the page. This will answer many of your questions about MERIT and help you get ready to use MERIT.
- If you have never registered in MERIT, click the MERIT Registration button. You will need your STARS ID to get going. If you do not have a STARS ID, please follow the instructions to request one. If you cannot find your STARS ID, start by [searching in the Early Care & Education and School-Age Professionals](#) to find your STARS ID. If you do not find a STARS ID number assigned to you, email merit@del.wa.gov.

PLEASE NOTE: DEL staff are responding as quickly as possible to MERIT-related emails and phone calls. Most of the emails and phone calls we get are from people who have forgotten their log-in information or can't find their STARS ID. **Please store your log-in information and STARS ID to avoid lengthy delays!**

Do my staff, volunteers and household members who are required to get a background check have to register for the portable background check registry through MERIT?

Yes. Anyone who needs to get a background check must register in MERIT and apply for the background check. Per state rules, this includes:

- The licensee
- Primary staff persons
- Assistants
- Volunteers
- Interns
- Contracted providers
- Non-criminal background checks are required for:
 - Volunteers or assistants ages 14 to 16 in licensed family home child care, and
 - Individuals ages 13 to 16 who live in the family home.

How do I as a licensee know when my staff need to get a background check?

It is your responsibility as the licensee to track when your staff need to apply for a new background check. Apply for facility registration in MERIT so that you can easily view and track whether your employees are meeting background check requirements.

How do I get started applying for a background check?

Start by visiting the background checks information page on the DEL website: www.del.wa.gov/requirements/new/background.aspx. There you will find general information about background check laws and rules, and instructions for applying for a background check. If you have questions, your local DEL licensing office can help. A list of DEL offices is online at www.del.wa.gov/about/contact.aspx.

